Blue Raiders Erase Deficit for 6-4 Victory

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee scored three times in the seventh and Steve Kline got his third save in four relief opportunities in a 6-4 victory over Lipscomb Wednesday night at Reese Smith Field.

The Blue Raiders fell behind 3-0 after two innings, allowing three unearned runs to the visiting Bisons with two costly errors. But Middle Tennessee fought back with a run in the third and two more in the fourth before the decisive seventh to post their fifth victory in six outings.

Kline, who has been delegated to the bullpen after struggling in six starts, worked 1.2 scoreless innings for his third save of the year and third in 11 days. Kline has picked up a save in three of his four outings and allowed just one run in 9.2 innings of relief work, striking out 13.

Middle Tennessee (21-12) chipped away at the lead after falling behind 3-0 early because of wildness by starter Jeff Kasser and shoddy defense.

Lipscomb (10-22) scored a run in the first after a leadoff double off the base of the centerfield wall by Brent Hastings. An infield single by Patrick O'Rourke followed, but the throw to first was wild and got away, allowing Hastings to score.

In the second Ryan Boyer reached on an error and Nick Cleckler was hit by the pitch. Kyle Jackson singled to left, scoring Boyer. Kasser then walked two batters, forcing in the third run of the contest for the Bisons.

Middle Tennessee finally got on the board in the third when Marcus Taylor drew a leadoff walk, Eric McNamee singled and Nate Jaggers plated Taylor with a groundout.

In the fourth the Blue Raiders got three straight hits to start the frame, singles from Brett Carroll and Shane Kemp, before a two-run double down the rightfield line by Derek Phillips tied the contest at three.

Kasser settled down after the first two innings, retiring 10 of his last 12 batters. The sophomore allowed three unearned runs on four hits in five innings in his second collegiate start.

The Blue Raiders used five hits to take the lead in the seventh.

Taylor led off with a triple after LU leftfielder Hastings fell down on the play. Chase Eakes ripped the first pitch from Bisons reliever Kyler Wetherington into leftfield, scoring Taylor for Middle Tennessee's first lead of the contest.

McNamee then singled, collecting his third hit of the game, his seventh three-hit game of the year and 19th multi-hit contest this season. Jaggers sacrificed both runners over with a bunt before Jeff Beachum chopped a single by a drawn-in infield, plating both runs for a 6-3 edge.

"Because this is not a big offensive team, our team has to have the mentality to find a way to win as long as our pitchers keep it close," Blue Raider head coach Steve Peterson said. "The guys in the middle of the order have to take on the responsibility to drive in runs."

Middle Tennessee's Eric Blevins (3-1), making his first appearance in 12 days, worked 2.1 innings to get the victory, giving up one run on two hits. Blevins hit two batters in the eighth before Kline came on, getting out of the eighth with one run scoring before working a scoreless ninth.

"It's a big move that we made taking Kline out of the starting rotation, but a lot of that has to do with BJ Church holding up his end," Peterson said.

"Kline is a good pitcher and has been through the wars. He struggled starting and we made the move with him to the bullpen and he has pitched well. So much of it has to do with how we do throughout the season. But sometimes someone else has to step up and Kline has done that out of the bullpen."

Wetherington (0-4) took the loss for Lipscomb, allowing three runs on three hits in two-plus innings of work.

McNamee led Middle Tennessee's 10-hit attack with three hits, with Carroll chipping in two. Beachum and Phillips both had two RBIs.

The Blue Raiders host Arkansas State this weekend in a three-game series starting Friday at 7 p.m. Seven Middle Tennessee seniors will be honored prior to Friday night's game, departing performers in men's and women's golf and men's and women's tennis.

GAME NOTES

Junior Brett Carroll extended his career-high hitting streak to 10 games with a single in the fourth ... Junior Eric McNamee collected three hits in the game, his seventh three-hit game of the year and 19th multi-hit contest this season ... Senior Derek Phillips extended his hitting streak to three games with a double in the fourth ... Junior Steve Kline made the move to the bullpen less than two weeks ago and has thrived in the role. Kline has worked 9.2 innings in four starts, allowing one run with 13 strikeouts and posting a 0.93 ERA.

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